LISTING OF CLAIMS:

The present listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1.-7. (Cancelled)

8. (Previously Presented) A map search system, comprising:

a map data storing unit for storing a plurality of stored information items, each of the plurality of stored information items being assigned to one of a plurality of possible search areas;

an area-designating information storage unit for storing a plurality of area-designating information items, each of the plurality of stored area-designating information items identifying one of the plurality of search areas;

a designating unit for designating a first search area as a target search area for retrieval, the first search area being chosen from the plurality of possible search areas;

a retrieving unit configured to search the target search area and retrieve one of the plurality of stored information items assigned to the target search area;

an input unit for receiving an input item, the input item including a search area-designating information item; and

a switching determination unit for determining whether the search area-designating item identifies the target search area;

a search-area switching unit for switching the target search area from the first search area to a second search area associated with the search area-designating information item, when the switching determination unit determines that the search area-designating item does not identify the target search area, the second search area being chosen from the plurality of possible search areas.

9. (Previously Presented) The map search system of Claim 8,

wherein the plurality of stored area-designating items include information items that indicate areas, each of which is capable of designating one of the plurality of possible search areas.

10. (Previously Presented) The map search system of Claim 8, further comprising:

an address-book storing unit for storing at least names that relate to positions and are associated with the plurality of stored area-designating items,

wherein the search-area switching unit switches the target search area from the first search area into the second search area based on the search area-designating item associated with one of the names that is inputted.

11. (Previously Presented) The map search system of Claim 8, further comprising:

a communicating unit for communicating with a portable storage medium that includes an address-book storing unit for storing at least names that relate to positions and are associated with the plurality of stored area-designating items,

wherein the search-area switching unit switches the target search area from the first search area to the second search area based on the search area-designating item associated with one of the names that is inputted.

12. (Previously Presented) The map search system of Claim 8,

wherein the search-area switching unit includes a notifying unit for notifying that the target search area is switched from the first search area to the second search area when the given search area-designating item is designated by an input item.

13. (Previously Presented) The map search system of Claim 8,

wherein the search-area switching unit switches back the target search area from the second search area to the first search area after a given period of time.

14. (Previously Presented) The map search system of Claim 8,

wherein the map search system is adapted to a car navigation device.

15. (Currently Amended) A search area designating method used in a map search system that stores (i) a plurality of information items, each of the plurality of information items being assigned to one of a plurality of search areas, and (ii) a plurality of stored search area-designating items, each of the plurality of stored search area-designating items identifying one of the plurality of search areas, the search area designating method comprising:

designating a first search area selected from the plurality of search areas as a target search area for retrieval;

receiving an input item, the input item including a received search area-designating information item;

determining whether the received search area-designating information item identifies the ~~target~~ first search area;

switching the target search area from the first search area to a second search area when the received search area-designating information item is determined to not identify the ~~target~~ first search area, the second search area being associated with the received search area-designating information item, the second search area being selected from the plurality of search areas; and

searching the target search area to retrieve one of the plurality of information items.